

## Royalty With A Squint

I'M telling this story as I heard it from a woman who loves Siamese cats. I don't know if it is someone's copyright story or if it is just one of those folk tales handed down from Siamese Cat-lovers to Siamese Cat-lovers from generation to generation. For all I know the story was told in *Muan-Thai*, the land of the free, a thousand years before the Royal Cat of Siam took the eye of the first European to behold him.

ONCE upon a time, a long time ago, there was a priest of a temple in ancient *Muan-Thai*, and the chief work of this priest was the guarding of a most precious goblet. For company in the temple the priest had a pair of cats (*Felis domestica*, the royal cat of Siam). These elegant cats, of a creamy-fawn colour with nigger-brown heads, paws, and tails, followed the priest devotedly about the temple all the days of their years. There came a time, however, when the priest had to go with a message to the palace of the emperor.

"Now," said he, "I am afraid to leave this precious goblet unguarded; but I must. So I commend it to the care of you both. Do not, I pray you, take your eyes from it. Guard it with your lives until I am here again." The priest then went his way down the steep hill, leaving the royal cats to guard the precious goblet.

The sun's shadow moved from here to there and was lost, and next day moved again from here to there and was lost; and on the third day the male royal cat of Siam said to his wife: "I must go after the priest. You must stay here, guarding the precious goblet and not taking your eyes from it. I shall surely return with the priest soon." And the male royal cat of Siam went his way after the priest, leaving the female royal cat of Siam to guard the precious goblet.

Next day the sun's shadow moved from here to there and was lost and the female royal cat of Siam grew more and more sleepy and her eyes began to squint with the strain of looking always at the precious goblet. So she, being a person of wisdom and ingenuity and knowing that she could no longer guard the precious goblet well enough with her tired eyes, hooked her long tail through the handle of the goblet and went contentedly to sleep.

Next day the sun's shadow had moved a little way from here, but had not yet reached to there, when the priest of the temple and the male royal cat of Siam came back up the steep path of the hill. And as they came into the courtyard of the temple they saw the female royal cat of Siam lying in the sun with happily blinking eyes and her tail hooked still through the handle of the precious goblet. And as they followed the gaze of her eyes they saw playing in the sun three royal kittens, each with a hook on the end of its tail, and each with a furious squint in the eyes.

And since that time, so the story says, all the royal cats of Siam have had hooks on the ends of their tails and they all

## CLOTHES IN WARTIME

### The Dressmaking Trade Booms When Troops Are In Town

CYNICS have asserted that the main reason why women are so interested in clothes is because they want men to be interested in women. And this theory would seem to hold good even in wartime for, according to a dressmaker interviewed by *The Listener*, booms and slumps in dressmaking in recent years have coincided with the presence or departure of troops.

On arrival at this dressmaker's workshop we looked around at the busy room scattered with all kinds of materials passing through the metamorphosis that transforms dress lengths into "creations."

"Isn't it rather odd that you should be so busy," we asked, "what with 'austerity clothes' and coupons, and wartime conditions?"

"Wartime would always be boomtime in the dressmaking trade if we could get the girls that we need for our work-rooms," replied the dressmaker. "Normally I need 16 or 17 girls and now I could easily employ that number or more, but naturally there are so many calls upon girls to go into the Services or into essential industries that we have great difficulty in getting the dozen or so that you see here."

"Curiously enough the rush periods in dressmaking in the first years of the war tended to come and go with the departure of the New Zealand echelons. I suppose the girls would get new outfits to wear during the last days of their boys' leave. Then there would be a flat period for dressmakers until the next contingent went. However, since the Americans arrived we have had a pretty constant boom: in fact we just can't meet the demand. Not that you can put it down entirely to that cause: I think a good part of the reason is that girls now just haven't the time to make their own clothes. Most people are working harder than ever before and in addition most girls do a good deal in the way of Red Cross work or helping at the various clubs. They haven't time to 'home make,' but they do have the money to get their frocks made by an expert. Perhaps I could add that American servicemen seem to expect girls to look smart and well groomed. They are pretty outspoken and they don't hesitate to say whether they like or dislike what a girl is wearing. Have you noticed a difference

fix a newcomer with a squinting regard as unwavering as it is disconcerting. Visit them in the Auckland Zoo and see for yourself. They live in the compartment next to those charming creatures, the spider monkeys, and at the moment there are kittens still young enough to be pure white.

-J.



in the office girls that you see about? I have. They have smartened themselves up, and it is a good thing, too."

"Of course girls are only a part of our customers. We get married women and business women, too — all sizes and shapes. And we have some difficulty at times in persuading the larger sizes that a pattern intended for young girls really would not become them. Unfortunately

the illustrations in fashion books are so fascinating that often people do not realise how far their own figures fall short of the ideal."

"What about coupons? How does the rationing affect you?" we asked.

"It might have affected us more if we had more girls in the workshop. As it is we have all the work that we can get through. It seems to me that the coupon allowance is very fair and should keep people from spending more than they need. It is a much more generous allowance than that in Australia or in England. As for materials, I think the new ones we are getting are rather lovely, especially in colour. Of course they are dearer and I don't think the quality is so good, but it seems to me rather wonderful that we are getting anything at all."

### Better Dressmaking

"Has simplification of clothes had much effect? Are fashions changing much?"

"Simplification or austerity regulations seem to me very sensible. There is still quite a wide margin for widths and lengths of gowns, and even trimmings are not cut out, only the amount of work that they entail is limited. That seems fair enough. On the whole this is good for us because it makes for much better dressmaking. A bad dressmaker can get away with a lot when the whole frock is covered with flounces and trimmings. But there is a swing back to tailored styles and they have to be well made."

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